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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#) [BR](#)

SUBJECT: BRAZIL-VENEZUELA: DEMARCHE TO MRE ON REFERENDUM, ANNOUNCEMENT OF PT PARTY SUPPORT FOR CHAVEZ

REF: STATE 168747

Classified By: Political Counselor Dennis Hearne. Reasons: 1.4 (B)(D).

¶1. (C) Summary, Foreign Ministry (MRE) Andean Division Chief Rubem Barbosa disagreed with reftel demarche's assertions about GOV manipulation and harassment in the run-up to the 15 August referendum, saying the MRE has received no such reports from the OAS observer mission or its embassy. He said the close-call nature of the coming vote seemed to be creating a strange calm in which neither side wants to be accused of disruptive actions. Brazil is heavily invested in the multilateral effort on the referendum and has ample reasons on the national level to fear instability in Venezuela, but the GOB is not making contingency plans for bilateral engagement in the event of a crisis. In related developments, Lula's PT Worker's Party announced on 5 August that the PT will send a delegation to Caracas to support the referendum and Chavez, but party president Jose Genoino stressed that support for Chavez is a PT position, not GOB policy. End summary.

VIEW FROM THE MRE: "IT'S TOO QUIET..."

¶2. (C) On 5 August PolCouns demarched Minister Rubem Barbosa, Andean Division Chief at the MRE, providing reftel points and stressing USG concerns about harassment incidents and GOV efforts to manipulate the judiciary in the run-up to the 15 August referendum.

¶3. (C) Barbosa said the MRE is in daily contact with the OAS observer mission in Venezuela, which is headed by Brazil's OAS Permrep. In that context Barbosa disagreed with reftel assertions about manipulation and harassment incidents, saying the MRE has received no such specific reports. While noting critically Chavez's recent "bombastic remarks" about the USG, Barbosa said the observer mission and Brazil's embassy in Caracas are reporting a pre-referendum situation that is "quiet, almost too quiet." Elaborating, Barbosa explained that the GOB had anticipated more friction, but that the "too close to call" nature of the coming vote, as indicated by polls and experts, seemed to be creating a strange calm in which neither side wants to be accused of blatant actions that could undercut their standing with voters and the international community. A sudden spike indicating advantage for one side or the other could shatter the calm, Barbosa added.

¶4. (C) As chair of the OAS Friends and with one of its senior diplomats heading the observer mission, Brazil is invested in -- and has its prestige associated with -- multilateral efforts to assure a peaceful and transparent referendum, Barbosa said. Moreover, instability in neighboring Venezuela obviously would be a grave matter for Brazil across the board. "For us, the stakes are incredibly high," Barbosa said, and there is profound concern within the MRE as 15 August nears. However, when polooff asked whether the GOB is currently gaming out contingency plans for bilateral political engagement in the event of an unfolding crisis, or considering its options for "day after" scenarios, Barbosa acknowledged that no such planning is underway. Barbosa said the GOB does plan to send a high-level envoy -- possibly MRE Under Secretary for South American Affairs Macedo Soares -- to Caracas shortly after the referendum, to underscore to "the winner, whoever it is" that Brazil wants to work with Venezuela to assure a stable way forward.

PT PARTY WILL SEND MISSION TO SUPPORT CHAVEZ

¶5. (C) Jose Genoino, national president of Lula's PT Worker's Party, announced on 5 August that the PT will send a delegation to Caracas for a meeting with Chavez on 11 August, as a gesture of the PT's support for the referendum process and the continuation of Chavez in office. Genoino repeatedly stressed that the support for Chavez is a party position, and does not reflect the official GOB position of neutrality.

¶6. (C) Comment. We cannot assess the accuracy of Barbosa's assertions that international observers are not reporting misdeeds, or that there is a fragile calm pervading Venezuela. What we can say is that it is ever clearer that, while the GOB has impressively invested influence and credibility into the multilateral efforts on Venezuela, it does not currently appear prepared to take a meaningful

bilateral role if there is an unfolding crisis after 15 August. On the national policy level, it appears to us that the GOB leadership has resolved to quietly cross its fingers and wait, perhaps expecting a Chavez win and hoping for some form of uneasy peace in the aftermath. But hope is not a strategy, and it is worrying that the GOB apparently is not prepared for decisive engagement if there is a post-referendum meltdown, despite the political, economic and security issues at stake for Brazil. The PT's wandering off to Caracas to embrace Chavez at this sensitive juncture, despite strenuous GOB efforts over the past several months to maintain a posture of objectivity, could further raise anxiety levels within the MRE and presidency as the GOB looks ahead to 15 August. We will continue to engage with the MRE on Venezuela over the next several days, and will seek an appointment asap with Under Secretary for South American Affairs Macedo Soares.

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